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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002959

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: ISCI'S AMAR AL-HAKEEM TO CODEL COLEMAN: WE'RE
WORKING IRAN TO RESTRAIN AL-SADR

REF: BAGHDAD 2906 (CRISIS IN KARBALA)

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Shi,a leader Amar al-Hakeem, groomed to replace his ailing father as head of the Islamic Supreme Council (ISCI), told Sen. Norm Coleman (R-MN) on September 1 that a violent attempt by Moqtada al-Sadr,s Jaysh al-Mahdi militia (JAM) to seize one of Shi,a Islam,s holiest shrines in Karbala had alienated Shi,a masses around the world. He said he was taking a wait-and-see approach to the "veracity" of al-Sadr,s order for the JAM to stand-down during a six-month reorganization period, adding that his organization is working its contacts with Iran in hopes of restraining JAM violence, much of which has been directed at ISCI. Responding to Sen. Coleman,s point on the need for greater political reconciliation, al-Hakeem said that Shi,a political leaders must "embrace" the Sunni minority, speak to Sunnis and address their fears, and reconcile with Sunnis who hold "reasonable" views. Hadi al-Amri, head of ISCI,s Badr militia and a senior ISCI parliamentarian, intoned that Americans mistakenly view Iraq,s main problem as the Shi,a - Sunni dispute when, in reality, the main problem is terror. Al-Amri stated that while Iraq does not want the American military to stay indefinitely, if it leaves now "it means that the terrorists have won the war in Iraq." End Summary.

Reaction to Karbala Violence, Al-Sadr,s JAM Gambit

12. (C) Asked by the Ambassador for reaction to last week,s violence in Karbala and Moqtada al-Sadr,s public pledge to suspend JAM operations during a six-month reorganization period (reftel), al-Hakeem stated that the Karbala incident had made a very negative impression on Shi,a in Iraq and abroad as it brought violence to a sacred place on a holy day. Clad in a black turban that distinguishes him, like al-Sadr, as a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, the thirty-eight year old Shi,a prelate stated that the coming days would reveal the veracity of al-Sadr,s order. He said ISCI had spoken to Iranians (unnamed) about the necessity of putting pressure on al-Sadr and his movement to prevent such things as the Karbala violence, and hoped Iran would apply more pressure in the coming days.

13. (C) Picking up on this theme, senior ISCI legislator Jamal al-Saghir said that he was recently in Tehran and could personally vouch for the pressure put on the Iranians by ISCI head Abdel Aziz al-Hakeem (who is undergoing cancer treatment in Tehran) to restrain al-Sadr. He said that Iranian concern over JAM was heightened by the recent assassinations of the governors of Muthana and Qadisyah provinces, and by a JAM attempt to take over a southern province (unnamed) in order to put pressure on the GOI. Regarding the Karbala violence, al-Saghir noted that ISCI received information in the past

weeks that JAM had originally intended to launch early-August attacks on ISCI/Badr personnel in Baghdad and to assassinate the commander of the Iraqi Army,s First Brigade, but that ISCI/Badr,s "containment" of such plans forced JAM to strike in Karbala. In a separate recent meeting, Badr militia supremo Hadi al-Amri told Poloffs that "JAM is hitting us harder than it is hitting you with Iranian weapons" and that Tehran,s reply to ISCI/Badr complaints about JAM was a demand for evidence of a JAM - Iranian link.

If USG Withdraws Now, Terrorists Win

¶4. (C) Al-Hakeem welcomed a short-term and long-term partnership with the USG to promote Iraq,s political process, reconstruction, and the development of its security forces. When asked when the USG can transition from a military to reconstruction role, al-Hakeem said that rushed efforts to build the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) allowed some "unwanted" elements to enter and that time would be needed to "cleanse," train, and arm the ISF. He also spoke of a need to "educate" the Iraqi people about USG military, economic, and reconstruction roles, and to instruct them about the societal dangers of forming armed groups. When Sen. Coleman pressed al-Hakeem to use his influence to pressure Iran to respect Iraq,s sovereignty and desist from contributing to Iraqi instability, al-Hakeem replied that Iraq is engaged in a dialogue with neighboring states seeking non-intervention in Iraqi affairs. He said some neighbors fear the USG presence in Iraq, others fear the growth of democracy in Iraq, while still others see Iraq as a place in which to settle old scores with the U.S. He stated Iraq is happy to see the USG engage in dialogue with neighboring states in order to allay their fears.

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¶5. (C) Sen. Coleman stated several times that Americans are willing to pay the price in money and in lives to topple the Saddam regime and to battle Al-Qaeda, but have no interest in getting caught in the middle of a sectarian war in Iraq. He urged al-Hakeem to use his considerable influence to promote political reconciliation and unity. Al-Hakeem replied that Iraq,s political class now has an historic opportunity to seize the momentum generated by last month,s Leadership Agreement by bringing all political parties together to support the accord. He said the Shi,a majority must "embrace" the Sunni minority and look to the future as well as the past, and that he is advising Shi,a political leaders to "be open minded to our Sunni brothers," to speak to Sunnis and address their fears, and to reconcile with Sunnis who hold "reasonable" views. Hadi al-Amri chimed in that Sunnis have so far refused to work in partnership with the Shi,a majority. However, he cautioned that Americans mistakenly view Iraq,s main problem as the Shi,a - Sunni dispute when, in fact, the main problem is actually terror. Even in the event of Shi,a - Sunni reconciliation, he maintained, Iraq would still face the problem of terrorism and terrorists drawn from outside countries, as evidenced by Fatah al-Islam fighters in Lebanon and North African extremists who had all trained in Iraq. Al-Amri closed by saying that while Iraq does not want the American military to stay indefinitely, if it leaves now "it means that the terrorists have won the war in Iraq."

¶6. (U) CODEL Coleman did not have an opportunity to review this message.

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